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SUBJECT: APNSA HADLEY'S MEETING WITH TURKISH PM ERDOGAN:
STRENGTHENING THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Classified By: CDA Nancy McEldowney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a 90-minute meeting with APNSA Hadley on September 23, Turkish PM Erdogan spoke of the challenges in the Middle East and the need for concrete steps to promote democracy. In that context, he stressed his theme of building personal relations with leaders of Turkey's neighbors, including Syria and Iran, but also Israel and the Palestinian Authority, because of the dividends those relations could reap in the form of encouraging reforms and democracy. Erdogan was appreciative of U.S. support for Turkey's EU aspirations and on the fight against the PKK, but pushed hard for concrete steps against the PKK in northern Iraq. The PM was scathing in his criticism of Iraqi President Talabani, whom he said presented himself as the "President of the Kurds, not the Iraqis" during his UNGA speech, and expressed concern about the Iraqi constitution, which had failed to deal with the special status of Kirkuk. He welcomed Hadley's proposal to establish a strategic dialogue between the U.S. and Turkey, as well as of the resumption of High Level Defense Group meetings and companion meetings between MFA and State Department as a means to strengthen our strategic partnership. End summary.

12. (C) PM Erdogan opened by describing the U.S.-Turkish relationship as a strategic partnership that goes back 50 years, and which has expanded and improved over the years through cooperation in international organizations and on regional issues. Erdogan focused on the BMENA Initiative as the way gradually to build democracy in conflict-torn countries in the region. Progress has been made - the withdrawal of 34,000 Syrian troops from Lebanon; Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Now the Palestinian Authority must crack down on terrorism to ensure further progress. Erdogan said he had met with Wolfensohn and PM Sharon in New York, and Shimon Peres the week before in Italy and pledged that Turkey would help facilitate the process. Concrete steps include:

--Creating a "solidarity" group among the Palestinian, Israeli and Turkish Chambers of Commerce; their first meeting took place in Turkey, their second on Palestinian territory; the third would be in Israel;

--The Turkish Union of Stock Exchanges and Chambers of Commerce was prepared to rebuild the Erez industrial area; PM Sharon, per Erdogan, had reacted positively. Erdogan estimated that infrastructure and other construction projects could employ as many as 5,000 Palestinians.

13. (C) More concrete steps are needed on BMENAI, Erdogan continued, to ensure it was more than just words. The Quartet will continue to play an important role. The 9 billion envisioned for infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza can be significant, but only with broad cooperation. Turkey, he claimed, is prepared to contribute its experience, knowledge and assets.

14. (C) NSA Hadley noted that his trip to Turkey was his first solo stop as NSA. Stressing the importance of the strategic partnership and our shared values and interest, he focused on:

--Europe, describing the U.S. vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace, with Turkey as a full contributing member - a step important for both the EU and Turkey. Recognizing Turkey's frustration with the lead-up to the October 3 start of accession negotiations, he urged Erdogan to keep his eye on the prize.

--The Middle East and the region surrounding Turkey, a key priority for President Bush. To achieve that, we must defeat terrorism and advance democracy and freedom; Turkey could play a critical role in both areas. With respect to Iran, Syria, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, it was important that the U.S. and Turkey share common policies to the extent possible.

15. (C) Erdogan responded that the BMENAI was a long-term process that would require countries in the region to acquire democratic rights - the right to organize, to associate, to pursue enterprise, as well as the right of free speech. Progress was piecemeal; each country holds elections, but they are not without flaws. The key was to create the right atmosphere, and that was not in the 170-member UN or other international meetings - a more intimate setting - bilateral

relationship - was needed. Turkey, Erdogan said, should not be considered a model - that would be presumptuous - but some in the region could draw inspiration. Democracy, Erdogan stated, should be a system of "modesty". And Turkey's democracy remains imperfect; the 59 years since a multi-party system was established in Turkey have seen 59 governments, and "interventions" (i.e., coups) have no place in democracy.

16. (C) Bilateral contacts could achieve results, per the PM. He offered Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip - completed despite internal opposition - as an example. The Palestinians should view this not as a victory, but as a step along the road to democracy. He described the preferable road via a Turkish proverb: You can fight with the vineyard owner or you can have the grapes. Turkey would rather harvest the grapes.

17. (C) Turning to Syria, for decades Turkey and Syria were nearly enemies. Syria harbored PKK leader Ocalan; the two countries came to the brink of war. Then they began to talk. Now the Syrians hand over terrorists to Turkey. The dialogue began with the Syrians sending their PM to Ankara; then President Asad came; finally, Erdogan traveled to Damascus. Prior to his Syrian trip, Erdogan stated, a number of Europeans asked him to raise issues. They were, he assured them, already in his talking points. Erdogan claimed to have told Asad that Syria needed to withdraw from Lebanon - it was bleeding his treasury dry and creating a bad international image. The response had come when Turkish President Sezer traveled to Syria several months later and Asad told him he would hear of the withdrawal of troops within one week "as a result of Turkey's request".

18. (C) With respect to terrorists who cross Syria's border into Iraq, Erdogan said he raised the issue and Syrian government ministers told him Syria had a long border that they could not control - much like Turkey's own porous border with northern Iraq, Erdogan added. In his own electoral district of Siirt, landmines and IEDs had exploded in recent weeks, killing and injuring soldiers. Iran, too, was fighting the PKK.

19. (C) Hadley expressed appreciation for Turkey's role. He stressed the importance of leadership, especially in the Palestinian Authority. President Abbas needs to provide leadership, bring in young people, take control of the security services. Erdogan agreed fully that Abbas needed to be strengthened and show leadership. On Syria, Hadley referred to the UN report on PM Hariri's assassination that Detlef Mehlis was expected to submit in three weeks. Seeking Erdogan's counsel, Hadley said that many believe the report will implicate some of the most senior officials in the Syrian government. Some in the region thought it might bring down Asad's government. Erdogan demurred, noting he had not met with Asad in some time. When he had visited Damascus, however, he had been struck by the apparently relatively high level of popular support for Asad. On the Hariri assassination, it was necessary to determine who the killers were; it could not be left a mystery. Hariri, Erdogan said, had been a good friend; he tried to maintain relations with his widow and had met with his son Sa'ad at UNGA.

110. (C) Erdogan's concern was that if Bashar al Asad goes, it would likely not/not pull Syria toward democracy; just the opposite. It could push Syria, he stated, into a chaos worse than that in Iraq and make Turkey's life - and that of all in the Middle East - more difficult. Asad wanted to make good use of his relationship with Turkey, Erdogan continued, but Syria needed a change in mentality. The establishment was stuck in old-think. Asad was trying to move past his father's legacy, be more inclusive in parliament, improve relations with a variety of groups. Over time, hearing different views could lead to greater understanding.

111. (C) The U.S., Hadley responded, had been frustrated by Asad. We had gone to him repeatedly over the past two years urging him to turn his back on terrorism and open the door to reform. We know that extremists cross into Iraq from Syria. Asad has done nothing. Now we are going to let the UN investigation into Hariri's assassination run its course. The results would come out and we would all have to live with the consequences, which could be "very consequential." Erdogan did not respond.

112. (C) Turning to the PKK, Hadley stressed that the U.S. has no illusions - they are terrorists who kill Turks. We know part of the problem comes from northern Iraq and we clearly have not done enough, he stated. Our opportunity will come as the Iraqi government strengthens, which we hope will occur after the December elections, and as their security forces gain strength. President Bush carried the message to Iraqi President Talabani last week that the U.S. and Iraq, working with Turkey, need to do more. We can disrupt the flow of money to the PKK and work to reduce their support base in Europe. He pledged to tell President Bush

that the one thing we could do to improve relations with Turkey would be to do more against the PKK.

13. (C) Erdogan thanked Hadley, but responded that Talabani had no power, no troops and was not the PM. Every day the PKK disperses itself more widely and becomes more difficult to track down. The border with Turkey is long and porous. Pressing, the PM stated that a joint U.S.-Turkish decision to take action would be "very important." Until we did so, the PKK would continue its attacks. Yes, it was important to cut off financing, but the PKK had many sources of income, including narcotics trafficking. They enjoyed support in Europe, too, both overt (from a political party in Norway, for example) and through tolerance for PKK broadcasting. Erdogan referred to Roj TV's Kurdish broadcasts from Denmark.

"The mothers (in the southeast) know only that language; they listen and teach their children," said the PM. The broadcasts help create a structure that threatens Turkey's unity. Mothers of Turkish soldiers who die at the hands of the PKK have, he said, lost patience. At funerals, they shout, "Down with the PKK" in the same breath as "down with the U.S." (Note: There was discussion in Turkish as to whether he should tell Hadley this; Hadley responded that he was already aware of it. End note.)

14. (C) Hadley proposed that the GoT provide the USG with an inventory by European country of various forms of support given to the PKK, which we could raise in capitals. Erdogan reacted positively.

15. (C) Returning to Talabani, Erdogan described him as "not the President of Iraq but the President of Kurdistan." Hitting his stride, the PM related that he had confronted Talabani at the UN and told him that personally. In five paragraphs, Erdogan said, Talabani had presented greetings from the Iraq people once, but spoken about Kurdistan and the Kurds, conveyed greetings from the Kurds and delivered a portion of his speech in Kurdish. "Are there no Arabs in Iraq? No Turcomans?" Erdogan asked rhetorically. Talabani needs to be inclusive, reach out to all Iraqis so that the entire nation views him as their President. He did not do it, Erdogan stated.

16. (C) The Iraqi constitution, in Erdogan's view, is deeply flawed. It could cause major incidents and fail to guarantee Iraq's territorial integrity. Kirkuk, he stated, must have special status. Each day more Kurds move into Kirkuk, creating a new reality and new claims on Iraqi oil resources. Historically, Kirkuk was not a Kurdish city, but Kurds are creating a demographic reality on the ground that, under the constitution, would entitle them to a disproportionate share of Iraq's oil riches. Moreover, the constitution is creating rifts among religious groups; it has caused major incidents in which many lives have been lost - the incident on the bridge; the recent death of 150; the clashes in Tal Afar. Steps should have been taken within the constitution to prevent this; Sunni Arabs should have been involved. The biggest difficulty was that some articles of the constitution are not amendable and were, in Erdogan's words, only designed to benefit Kurds - not a condition that should prevail in a democracy. Iraq is 65% Shia; that, too will provoke problems. Elections will likely resolve little.

17. (C) Erdogan was right to be concerned, Hadley responded, but the U.S. did not think it written in stone that it would go badly. Not everything was resolved within the framework of the constitution. At this point, with a weak government, it was not possible to solve these difficult issues. In our view, the Iraqis made the right decision to leave some issues for the government that would be formed after the December elections. But, he agreed, delay had a cost as the situation on the ground was changing.

18. (C) Hadley asked Erdogan for a readout of the PM's New York meeting with Iranian President Ahmedinejad. Erdogan responded that he had never before met Ahmedinejad, but they had in common their experience as big city mayors (Erdogan - Istanbul, and Ahmedinejad - Tehran). He implied that Ahmedinejad was not as modernizing as one of his Tehran mayoral predecessors, with whom Erdogan had enjoyed a warm relationship and inaugurated Istanbul and Tehran as sister cities. Erdogan spoke with Ahmedinejad about terrorism and WMD. The Iranian President told him that he was determined to continue the process with the IAEA, but that Iran needed cheap, safe, peaceful energy; Iran, he told Erdogan, was making no efforts to build WMD. Were that the case, Erdogan noted, it would certainly be of concern to Turkey. Turkey, too, he added, is looking into nuclear power to lower the KWH cost of energy for its industry which, at 7 cents, renders Turkish industry uncompetitive. Erdogan again stressed the importance of "talking".

19. (C) Hadley responded that we, indeed, hoped Iran would want to reopen discussions with the EU-3. Erdogan agreed, saying they had to, or they risked further isolation. The U.S., Erdogan said, offering Turkey's good offices, "should

have confidence in us; we can assume major responsibility. We know their language, we can understand their culture, we can sit down and discuss, together with the IAEA." Hadley emphasized the difference between the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and enriching or reprocessing uranium. He pointed out that even if the Iranians undertook enrichment or reprocessing under IAEA supervision, they could at some point kick the IAEA out and start producing weapons.

120. (C) In closing, Hadley proposed that we re-start the High Level Defense Group (HLDG) process with Turkey, which has lain dormant for two years, and inaugurate a similar structured dialogue between their Foreign Ministry and the State Department. Erdogan responded enthusiastically, proposing that the Interior Ministry be included as well because of its responsibilities in the fight against terrorism. Hadley concurred.

121. (C) As the meeting broke up, Erdogan pulled Hadley aside to ask U.S. help on the EU, and to press the Austrians to leave Turkey's EU negotiating framework as is. It was in any event not an ideal document, Erdogan said, but Turkey was prepared to accept it as is. What Turkey could not accept was any attempt to move the Cyprus negotiations out of the UN context.

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